# livingCity

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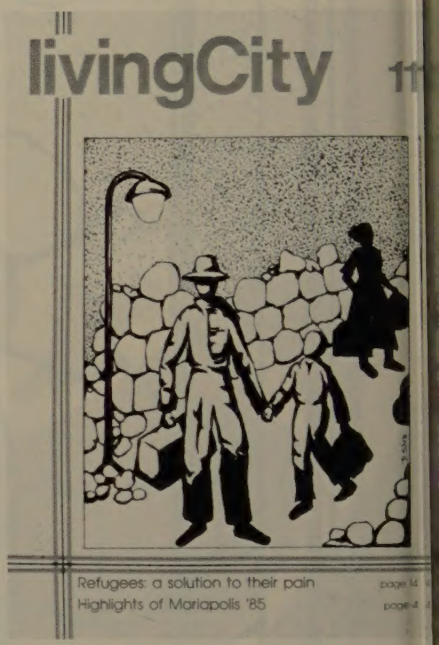


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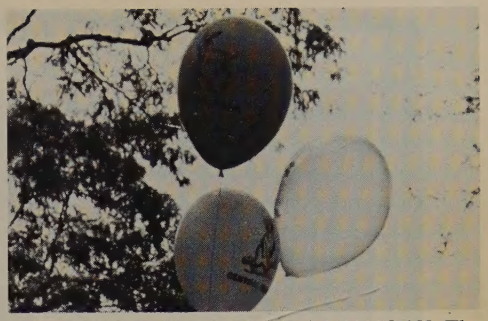

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# Unity and the Saints

by CHIARA LUBICH

**We asked Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, a movement animated by the "spirituality of unity", how the charisms which gave life to different religious families in the Church have emphasized or presently emphasize the Christian concept of unity.**

The authentic charisms that bring about new religious families in the Church cannot help but emphasize unity because they are sent by the Holy Spirit in order to edify the Christian community, the body of Christ, the Church. As we saw in past installments, this was certainly the case for Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare of Assisi, Saint Angela of Foligno, Saint Catherine of Siena, Saint Angela Merici, Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint Maria Maddalena de Pazzi, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Louise de Marillac, Saint Francis de Sales. All of them, sooner or later, came to the understanding of the value of unity and urged their spiritual children to be builders of unity.

Let us now pass on to some saints of recent times, canonized saints or persons popularly regarded as saints.

The thoughts on unity of Saint Frances Cabrini (1850-1917) are close to those expressed by Saint Maria Maddalena de Pazzi but, as with all these saints who always have their original characteristics because of the Holy Spirit who speaks in them, she adds something new: to live unity for her means to live in God; and, according to her, many graces can be expected from God for those who live in unity.

In September 1894, while on the boat travelling from Genoa to New York, she wrote: "Persons who are united in charity peacefully rest in God and await with certainty, many important graces from his goodness. Persons who are united in love are generous and magnanimous, because they are, as it were, carried along by God; their spirit always soars. The soul even reaches heaven. It rests at the feet of God's throne, and God, finding pleasure in this soul, fills it with his most precious graces."[1]

Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916), following the instructions of his spiritual director, wrote down and made a collection of his meditations. Meditating at length on the Gospel, and reading Matthew 23:10 "You have only one Father and he is in heaven", he noted that among all people there must be a love that not only unites them, but makes them "one": "God is our Father; he condescends to call himself our Father. Thus we owe him our filial love and respect, the trust one has for the most venerable and tender of fathers.... Because God is the Father of every human being, how much love we should have for each of these sons and daughters of such a Father! A deep fraternal love should unite us to each person since we have the joy of belonging to such a family. If a good father of a human family desires to see peace, union, charity, and a tender love always reigning among his children, how much more does God who is Love[2] desire to see this peace, unity and perfect brotherly love always among us, his sons and daughters: 'That they may be one as we are one ... may they be so completely one"[3].... This means: I want you to be united by such a love that you are not only united, but 'one': and I propose as the ideal of your reciprocal love, the love of the Persons of the Blessed Trinity or better, that this charity and love may be so dear and pure that you suffer everything in your own person and in your own goods rather than do anything that could diminish it."[4]

In his meditations on the Gospel, Charles de Foucauld constantly returns to one basic theme: all persons are members of Jesus, therefore we must do good to all, first to their souls and then to their bodies.

Commenting on the seventeenth chapter of St. John this theme is even further deepened and enriched: " 'May they all be one, as you Father, are in me and I am in you; that they may be one in us'[5]: let us try to be united like this with all people through brotherly love. May we be one with them as the Father and the Son are one because of mutual love. We are in all persons through our love as the Father is in the Son through his love for the Son, and as the Son is in the Father through his love for the Father. In fact, when you love someone, you are really very much in that person. You are in him or her through love, you live in that person through love. You no longer live in yourself, because you are no longer attached to yourself. You are detached from yourself, outside of yourself. You no longer live in yourself. You are in the one you love. You live his life, you are in him ... in view of God."[6]

The apostolic method of Charles de Foucauld is based on that of Saint Paul, that is, making himself "all things to all men": "Learn from him (Paul) to be tender, warm and to love the others intensely, to laugh with those who are laughing, and to cry with those who are crying, to be all things to all persons in order to win all."[7]

We find in one of his letters his program of action for his contacts with the Arabs: "Make yourself all things to all people in order to give them to Jesus. Do good to everyone and have brotherly affection, serving everyone as much as possible. Remain in contact with them as amiable brothers with all so that little by little you may lead them to Jesus by practicing his meekness."[8]

Father Luigi Orione (1872-1940) emphasized in his writings the force that lies in unity: "...the strength of religious priests lies in unity, whose bond is Jesus Christ and the Holy Mother Church, the Mother of Rome. From this humble, filial and fraternal union we will feel that we have great strength. We will feel that we are God's army perfectly lined up. We will feel, and in fact we will be the Lord's army, formidable to his enemies and invincible."[9]

Also Escriva' de Belaguer (1902-1975) the founder of Opus Dei, was attracted to the reality of unity. He recognized the need of it, its effectiveness, the absolute essentiality of it.

In an interview he stated: "An essential part of the Christian spirit is to live not only in union with the ordinary hierarchy—the Roman Pontiff and the episcopacy—but also to be united with all our brothers and sisters in the faith. We must revive that brotherhood which the early Christians felt so profoundly."[10]

In one of his writings we read: "The efforts of each one of you individually have little effect. But if you are united by the charity of Christ you will be amazed at your effectiveness."[11] "Unity. Unity and submission. What do I want with loose parts of a clock, even if they are finely wrought, if they can't tell me the time?"[12]

Let us conclude with Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

In her words we often encounter her faith in the power of unity, her certainty that, united in Christ, everything is possible.

Her manner of speaking is often characterized by the use of maxims:
"Remain very closely united around the community, because God is it center."[13]
"Some persons do one thing, others another in the Church. What matters is that all remain united, each one carrying out his or her specific task."[14]
"The unity of Christians is something important because Christians represent light for others."[15]

**Chiara Lubich**

*1) "...Tra un'onda e l'altra", Viaggi di Francesca Saverio Cabrini, Milan 1967, pp. 175-176; 2) 1 Jn. 4:8; 3) Jn. 17:22-23; 4) Charles de Foucauld, "Scritti Spirituali", IV, Rome 1973, pp. 332-333; 5) Jn. 17:21; 6) Charles de Foucauld, "Scritti Spirituali", IX/II, Rome 1974, pp. 64-65; 7) Charles de Foucauld, "Scritti Spirituali", IX/I, Rome 1974, p. 132; 8) Charles de Foucauld, "Gridare il Vangelo con la vita", Torino 1970, p. 69; 9) Don Orione, "La scelta dei poveri piu poveri/Scritti Spirituali", Rome 1979, p. 158; 10) "Colloqui con monsignor Escriva' de Balaguer", Milan 1973, p. 98; 11) J. Escriva' de Balaguer, "Cammino", Milan 1974, p. 217; 12) ibid., p. 245; 13) Madre Teresa, "La gioia di darsi agli altri", compiled by J. L. Gonzales Balado, Pauline Edition, Rome 1980 p. 137; 14) ibid., p. 178; 15) ibid., p.213.*

# Together For The Civilization Of Love

"Together for the Civilization of Love" was the challenging title of the 1985 Mariapolis five of which took place on the North American continent and one in the Caribbean.

This annual summer convention of the Focolare Movement took place from the multicultural city of Las Cruces, New Mexico to the natural splendor of Nelson, B.C., from the enchantment of the Caribbean isle of the Dominican Republic to the quaint and historical town of Sherbrooke, Quebec, and finally to Alfred, New York, history making for hosting five Mariapolises in these recent years.

The sites were as excitingly different as a continent as vast as this could offer, but the reality built was always the same—unity. The same also was the invitation made to each participant on the first morning of this unusual convention: to put everything aside, forgetting worries and concerns as unwanted luggage, in order to love fully that neighbor next to us.

What were the results? Joy, peace and the courage to start again—all fruits of a life based on Jesus' commandment of mutual love.

"It was great!" a young woman commented, "I feel I have entered a world very different from the one I came from ... it's been like being part of a little piece of a 'new' world ... like heaven on earth!"

A Presbyterian minister told us how he was struck by the intensity with which the word of God was put into practice: "The universality of this spirit has made us all one family, like a living Christian community."

One of the younger participants, a twelve year old, commented: "This was a wonderful experience for me of becoming a new person in Christ ... every activity helped me to love always and love all."

A mother shared, "I'm so full of joy to have a new way of life ... I feel that my horizons have been widened and I can love Jesus in each of my children ... in everyone! I have more hope and excitement in living now that I ever would have dreamed possible!"

A student from Texas: "This was the first Mariapolis I ever attended, and I feel that this is the kind of society that we should have ... I experienced a deep peace and a sense of great value for life here, as though every other thing one could do with his life would come into second place. It's hard to explain, but what you see with your eyes you can't explain with words, you just feel that this is real life."

Men and women religious from a variety of congregations, and priests from neighboring and distant dioceses, brought their valuable contribution to the Mariapolises. "I found the whole week very inspiring and very loving," a nun attending her first Mariapolis told us at the week's conclusion.

The last day in Alfred was characterized by a very special event. Archbishop Pio Laghi, Apostolic Pro Nuncio, visited the 800 gathered at Alfred University and expressed to all his deep love and appreciation of the Focolare Movement.

Day by day, with a program of talks, songs, experiences of life and games, the Mariapolis took on its keynote characteristic, that of being *one* family. This was reinforced by coming together each day for the celebration of the Eucharist.

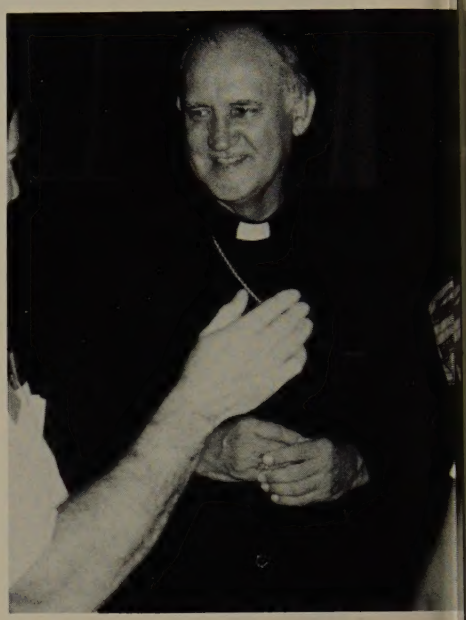
What do those "old timers" who were taking part in their fourth, eighth or even sixteenth Mariapolis tell us? Is it all the same? Certainly not, because in each one there is a unique discovery to be made, a new and precious understanding of this immense treasure called unity.

What was the discovery of Mariapolis 1985? Jesus Forsaken, key to unity with our neighbor. This in fact was the title of the theme prepared by Chiara Lubich and given in all the Mariapolises held throughout the world. Among other things, in this talk Chiara said: *"The spirituality of the Focolare Movement is based on two foundations. On one hand, the unity that Jesus prayed for in his last prayer, and on the other, Jesus Crucified, considered especially in the moment when he cries out, "My Lord, my Lord, why have you forsaken me?"*[1] *These two aspects, unity and Jesus Crucified, with everything that happened on the cross, therefore the abandonment by his Father included, are linked to each other as cause and effect or effect and cause. It was Jesus Crucified in fact who reestablished our unity with God as well as with one another."*

*"And,"* Chiara continued, *"Jesus said: 'This is my commandment, that you love one another.' But he didn't leave us without a model because he said, 'As I have loved you.' Nor did he leave us without an explanation, because he added, 'There is no greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend.'*[2] *Jesus Crucified is the way to love our neighbor. His death on the cross, his abandonemnt, is the highest divine, heroic lesson of Jesus on what love is. This vision of Jesus Crucified and Forsaken is what the Holy Spirit has imprinted in the hearts of the members of the Movement in order for them to know what love is.... In the past years we saw that to love means to serve, and we saw that there is no better way to serve than making ourselves one with our neighbor. No one like Jesus Forsaken made himself one with all. For this reason, he is the model of the one who loves; he is the way, the key to unity with our neighbor."*[3]

**From north to south,** east to west, then, the Mariapolis left an indelible mark in the hearts of all who participated in it and brought all to a new understanding of the secret to unity—the love for Jesus Crucified and Forsaken. The parting words of a person who took part in the Southwest Mariapolis seemed to sum up the week's spirit: "I felt like saying, 'Lord, you gave us everything, show us your face.' But then I thought of the faces I've seen of the people here in Mariapolis and I realized that in a way perhaps he already had!"

*1) Mt. 27:46; 2) Jn. 15:12-13; 3) Unity and Jesus Forsaken" Chiara Lubich, New York 1985, New City Press.*



*The Mariapolis enjoyed the visit of a number of special guests: Above, Apostolic Pro-Nuncio Pio Laghi (left) with Archimandrite Justinian Dalea of the Rumenian Orthodox Church, at the East Coast Mariapolis.*
*Below: Bishop W. Emmett Doyle of Nelson, B.C. Canada visited the Northwest Mariapolis which was held in his diocese.*

*Bishop Grahmann (above) of Victoria, Texas and Bishop Martinez (below) of Las Cruces, New Mexico, were present at the Southwest Mariapolis.*

*Ursula Lulley, from Long Island, New York, a mother of five, shared with the Midwest/East Coast Mariapolis the following experience of encountering Jesus Forsaken in the physical and spiritual suffering that came with illness.*

For several years my family and I have been trying to live the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement. I think that the successes and failures in trying to put it into practice have provided the training ground for living out my experience of these last two months.

Two months ago I went to my doctor because I was being bothered by a very minor medical problem. I'm normally such a healthy person that I didn't realize how long it had been since my last visit. In light of this, my doctor wanted to do a full check-up and this lead to the discovery of a very large mass or tumor.

He immediately expressed concern and wanted me to follow it up with some tests. The seriousness with which he implored me to proceed with these tests, and the uncertainty of my condition, were, for me, an encounter with Jesus Forsaken. By loving him in that moment I found peace. I felt as if God had embraced me with his love, and I also felt, almost as if by instinct, without anyone else mentioning it, that I had cancer.

One of the gifts of living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement is that so much of it permeates your life and comes to you spontaneously in moments such as these. The first thing that came to me was to renew my faith in God who is love. There had been a time in my life when, if unpleasant things happened, I would question God's personal love for me. I was thankful that I no longer viewed life in this way. I was certain of his promise to be with us, with me, through anything. Thus I knew that if I could really accept him in this suffering I would be united to him in a very special way. I realized that the wisest thing for me to do was to surrender to his loving plan. This immediately filled me with joy and peace, and fear disappeared.

I took the tests that the doctor suggested, and the report came back that the tumor was highly suspicious. I knew that I would have to find a good surgeon. Since, as part of the family of the Focolare, we share not only our joys but also our sufferings, I called the women at the center to communicate what was happening. Everyone not only began to pray with me but they also helped me to find the best doctors and hospital.

The next day found me driving alone into New York to have my X rays read and to receive the official diagnosis. As I was driving along, a sense of fear welled up inside of me. I thought to myself, "I feel like I'm going to the guillotine. When I get to the surgeon's office, I'm going to get the death sentence."

In this moment I recalled the words of a saint (St. Aloysius Gonzaga) that Chiara Lubich had repeated to a young focolarina who was dying. One day, during the childhood of this saint, he was playing. Someone approached him and asked him what he would do if he were to be told that he would soon die. The boy replied, "I would keep on playing." I tried to put myself in the same disposition, remembering the focolarina who had fully embraced her physical sufferings as an aspect of Jesus Forsaken and had lived each moment to the fullest. I realized that also my fear was an aspect of Jesus Forsaken to be loved. I said my yes to him and found peace once again. I started to live the present moment with new determination, preparing myself to love my husband who would be waiting for me at the doctor's office and all those I would meet.

That day I received the confirmation that it was a cancer that had to be surgically removed. The moment had arrived to communicate the news to our five children. The experience in the car that day had given me a new freedom to love. Together with my husband we were able to share the news of my illness with them in such a way that they too saw everything as God's love for us. We felt closer than ever.

**A few days later** I was travelling back to the city again, this time by train with my husband. It was a long day, with many tests and consultations. Coming home exhausted that evening, I started to feel downcast, and fear returned. I reminded myself, "... keep on playing," and I repeated over and over to myself, "I believe

in the love of God for me." As we were about to get off the train I said to my husband, "You know, I'm so drained from this day, I'm tempted to just go home and go to my room, lock the door and have a good cry." Then, remembering my decision, I smiled and said,"Or I could make dinner and love the kids." We laughed.

Well, God had another plan for us that evening. When we got home, our eleven year old daughter came hobbling to the door to show us her swollen ankle. We had to bring her to the emergency room right away. As we got back into the car I couldn't help thinking that humanly speaking, this was getting ridiculous. I was supposed to go to the hospital in four days and now my daughter had a broken leg. Another conviction was stronger however, that everything, everything was an expression of God's love for me. this conviction seemed contagious. My daughter surprised me with an attitude free of complaints; she was even happy thinking that she too had a suffering that could be offered out of love.

**My surgery went** smoothly. In fact, the surgeon (I don't think he knew how many people were praying), kept saying how well everything had gone. However, we still had to wait for the pathology report as there was concern that, due to the size of the tumor, the cancer had spread to the lymph nodes. This was the crucial point because it seemed to indicate how long my life would be. My only hope was that the cancer had not spread that far.

*Ursula Lulley, at the Mariapolis in Alfred, New York.*

I thought I had given my life to God, but now it seemed as if I wanted to repossess it. It was a struggle to say another complete yes. Naturally, I gave him my preference, saying, "If nothing else Lord, my family does seem to need me," but I knew that I had to say yes to whatever his will for me might be and entrust my family to him. It was a much harder yes, but once I was able to do it I again felt a great inner peace.

The peace was accompanied by such a sense of joy that I even found myself enjoying my hospital surroundings. I was in a room with three other women. One had undergone the same operation with the same surgeon. She was very, very frightened because she knew many people who had died of the same disease and she wanted to tell me about every one of them. In conclusion she would add, "...but of course that's not going to happen to us." It was apparent to me that my condition was more advanced than hers, and I'd sometimes think, "I'm not so sure about me." I found myself trying to invent all kinds of ways to avoid her and her constant talk of death, however, she had decided that she liked me and even wanted my phone number to keep in touch afterwards. I hesitated only long enough to remind myself she was the neighbor next to me who needed to be loved.

One night my friend was trying to talk to the woman next to me through her drawn curtains. The other woman, who was anticipating surgery, became quite agitated and said: "Why do you have those curtains closed... I can't talk to you this way; open them!" It was apparent that no one in the room really felt like getting up to open up the curtains. Personally, I felt like a black cloud had come over me (all the talk of death was beginning to get to me). I was hopeful and believed in the love of God, but my roommate kept planting seeds of doubt. I felt almost powerless to combat this darkness. I said, "Lord, I'm just too tired." Then it came to me, "This darkness is you, Jesus Forsaken; this doubt is you. I can love you in this." With an energy I didn't know I had, I got out of bed and pulling my IV pole along beside me I opened all the curtains so that the two women could talk more freely. As I crawled back into bed I felt a new joy in my heart. The black cloud had disappeared. Once again, God had not let himself be outdone in generosity.

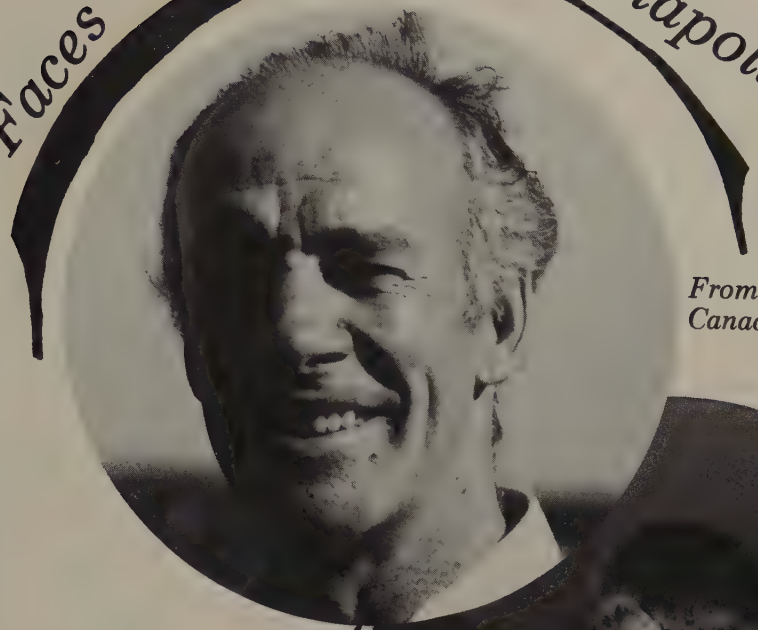
**Although my doctor** was pleased with the way the surgery had gone, he could not tell us anything regarding my prognosis. Everything depended

on the pathology report which we were to receive in five days. My relatives and I wanted to press him for more information, to ask him to rush the report. It seemed to me that my future depended upon the outcome of this report.

One morning, while praying for the woman next to me who had left for surgery, a new understanding came to me—my life did not depend on this pathology report, it was in the hands of God. At that moment, the anxieties that I had felt before disappeared and I was at peace again. I made the decision that I would not ask the doctor again about the report. Later, during one of his visits, I had to smile when he said, "By the way, Mrs. Lulley, I'm going to rush that report as much as I can!"

In the end, we were happy and grateful to be told that the cancer had spread to only one lymph node. The oncologist (the specialist in chemotherapy) explained that when you enter the lymph nodes there's always a possibility that a microscopic cell may escape and therefore chemotherapy is necessary. He then gently explained to me that people become anxious because there are no guarantees. I didn't find this news depressing, however, because it was now a reality for me that there are never any guarantees on tomorrow; there is only the present moment in which I can "keep on playing." Later, I learned that due to chemical changes in my body I would not need the chemotherapy at all. I felt immense gratitude to God for the gift of his very personal love. □

## Faces of the Mariapolis



*From Quebec, Canada*

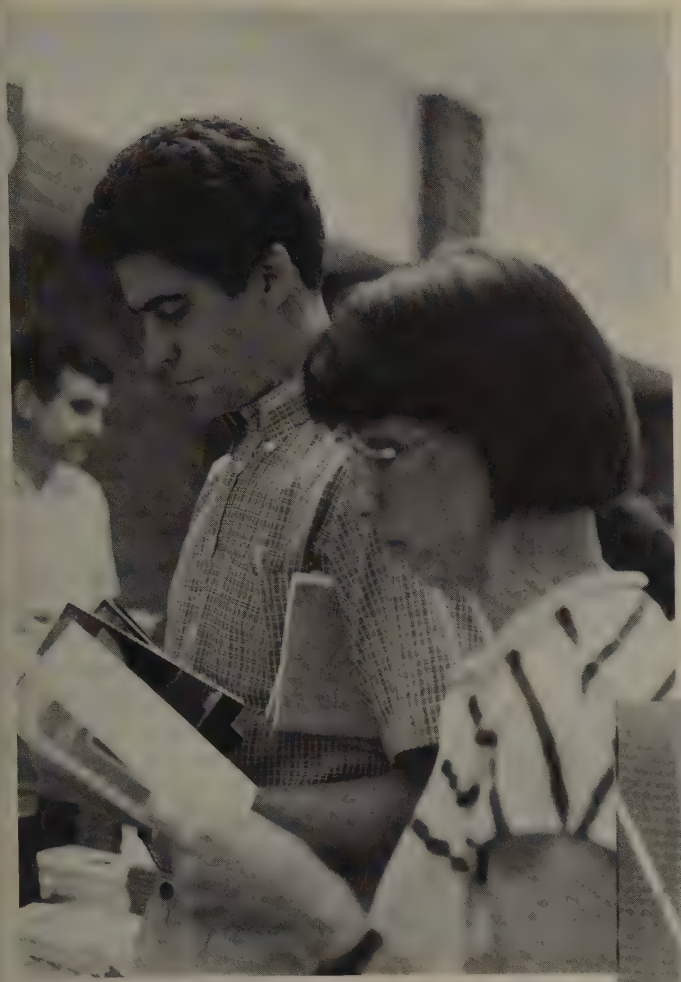
*to the Southwest*

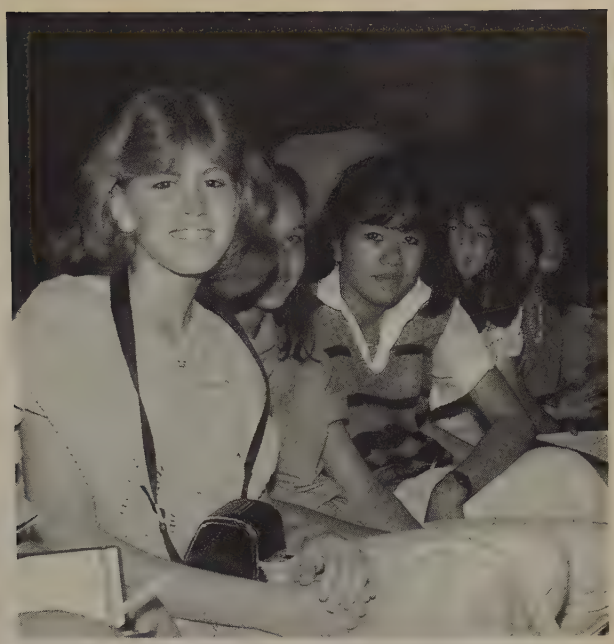
*from the Caribbean*

*to Alfred New York*

*everyone found the Mariapolis to be unforgettable.*

# *Moments of the Mariapolis*





MARIAPOLIS '85

# Building the present

## No future?

**Question: These are difficult times for young people. Many distrust the future and tragically end up fleeing reality in drugs.... Apathy is a widespread reaction to the inability to resolve the great problems of our era, for example, the threat of nuclear war. A popular slogan among young people is, "No future!" How can we bring them hope?**

**A group of young people from Germany**

**Answer:** It's true. The times in which we live are full of tremendous opportunities but, perhaps even more, with menacing threats unthought of years ago. What can be done?

Perhaps we should consider a truth which we often forget. Today we fear the future. Could it be that is so because our culture is so wrapped up in the future, almost exclusively in the future? I'm not saying that the future isn't important. We think, however, that the best way to plan for it, to build it and to envision it—in a hopeful way—is to focus on living well "today," on living the present moment. It is in the present moment that God makes himself present to us, God without whom we can't make plans for the future; we cannot even live the present. Furthermore, what could upset the future more than a threat already existing in the present?

I can hope in the future if today I am accomplishing something and work at carrying it ahead. I will be able to face the future if today I have done something worth living for.

Should we or shouldn't we then make plans for the future?

We really have only the present in our hands. Let us do all we can now to better things, and continue to do so until that "uncertain" future becomes the present. Life in the present moment gives hope and shapes the future.

Our future depends on what we make of the present. We will realize how much moral, intellectual and spiritual resources we waste when we direct them towards something which doesn't exist yet, which confuses us with its "unrealness" and makes us unreal as well, because we flee from the present moment, the only moment we have in our hands.

Let's not get lost in something that does not yet exist. We cannot and do not know how to carry the burdens of the future. Let's concentrate on the here and now. The plans for the future are as viable as our work for them today.

**Giuseppe Zanghi**

*"A popular slogan among young people is, 'No future!' "*

## To have or to give

**Question: How can we live for a united world in our consumer society which exalts having rather than being and places self interest above the common good? We feel that among the Gen a new mentality is developing regarding possessions and their use. What consequences could this have for the future?**

**A group of Gen from Switzerland**

**Answer:** The answer to this question is contained in the statement you made: "We feel that among the Gen a new mentality is developing regarding possessions and their use." I believe that it's a matter of strengthening this new mentality and living joyfully a life based on the Gospel.

How can we describe this mentality in just a few words? Here is what Chiara Lubich said about those who invest their lives in possessing and having: "Jesus warns them because by doing this they place themselves in direct opposition to his teachings. Jesus wants us to lead lives similar to the life of God, and... God is love. Jesus wants the lives of all people to be love as well. We truly find ourselves, not by amassing possessions, but by loving, by giving."[1]

Let's consider all that we have (and for which we rightly work hard and plan) as something that we will truly possess only when we have shared it with all our brothers and sisters, beginning with those close to us. This is the way to involve them in this new life, in this giving; this is the way to reach all people.

What are the consequences of a life like this for the future? It will be the continuation of what we are already experiencing in the present: that is, a world in which mutual love leads to a just and true sharing.

**Carlos Claria**

*1) "Costruire sulla Roccia" Rome 1983, p. 131.*

# Stories of War and Peace

*A letter recently reached us from friends of the Focolare in Lebanon. They live in a small village near Beirut.*

**Ain Aar, Lebanon.** The political situation is growing steadily worse. Christian refugeess from the south continue to flock to the larger cities like Beirut. They arrive with packs on their backs, a suitcase or plastic bags in hand, with their children trailing behind and great suffering in their hearts.The Institute for the Re-education of the Deaf is full; every corner is utilized to offer temporary shelter to these people. Meanwhile, the school for deaf and mute children continues. Our families have all offered hospitality to at least one or two other families.There is one positive aspect to it all—if this doesn't sound too absurd—that almost half the entire community of the Focolare Movement in Lebanon is housed in our little village or surrounding area.

We have set up a work station, and organized visits from house to house to be sure that every family has at least the essentials in food and household items: milk, pots and pans, clothing, soap, some toys for the children. The needs are many and often pressing but God's Providence is never lacking just as during the time of war at the beginning of the Movement in Trent.

It is beautiful to see the relationship built with these persons who have suffered so much, who have had to leave everything behind. As we set out to visit them we bear one desire in our hearts—that it might be Jesus in our midst[1] going out to these people, and in fact, there have been some very beautiful moments.

Yesterday a woman asked Therese: "Why did your friend stop to talk to us on the street? Was it because she saw that we were so unfortunate while the people in the store considered us a nuisance? Don't leave us by ourselves; even if you have nothing to give us, come and visit. You give us something much more valuable than material goods; you give us your heart."

We met a priest who was overburdened and disheartened by the constant suffering. We spoke with him; about hope and we offered him the leaflet with the commentary on the word of life.[2] "This is the answer," he confided afterwards, for he had been troubled by the fact that he couldn't find a way to communicate the words of the Gospel, to comfort the people who were in such great need.

Yes, we often have the opportunity to live like "people of hope" preferring to have a little less, going without a bed, without our little corner of the

room, constantly moving our things about; yielding, yielding everything, willingly.

**In order to reach** as many people as effectively as possible we divided the surrounding area into smaller regions and into groups of families. The other day, looking over the whole situation, we said, "But we are able to do so little compared to the tremendous need." Therese reminded us, however, that Jesus promised to repay even a glass of water given in his name. He didn't mention a tank of water.... As a matter of fact we did have a problem with our water tank, but Therese was right about the 'measure' we had to keep in mind in all our actions.

We are trying to function as a 'link-up' between the different organizations working throughout the area—the Red Cross, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Caritas and others. Our desire is to complete this network of help available by offering firsthand information on the peoples' needs. Often these agencies ask us to help them get needed supplies to their destination, or perform other services that don't really fall into the category of one organization or another, such as finding a sum of money to fix a broken wall for example, or obtaining some expensive pharmaceuticals from Europe, or helping to resolve a difficult conflict.

Speaking of water tanks, Lena—who besides looking after her own family is following the situation of a group of fourteen other families—met the wife of the President of the Republic of Lebanon while she was visiting one of the refugee camps and obtained from her the promise of the delivery of a tank of fresh water every day to a convent where these families are living. As of this moment we are in constant contact with seventy families, that is, with about 400 people; they are large families, almost all victims of recent acts of violence. We try to visit them often and recently we thought of organizing a "permanent" central location where they can come whenever they need help.

Our groups are divided and the re-divided, given the constant instability of the situation. We strive to remain always united, reminding one ►

another that every suffering in every present moment can be overcome through our love for Jesus in his abandonment.

**Two young first aid** workers from our village were killed attempting to save a man who had fallen into a ditch. They were Joseph and Michel. They had always struck us with their sincerity, with their dedication, their deep spiritual commitment. Joseph's family had lived in our area for some thirteen years. He was the oldest of five children and the head of the house since his father died three years ago.

It was a difficult moment for everyone but above all for his mother. The hospital was a scene of desolation with the sorrow of the relatives and the worry and concern of everyone in the village. I knelt down before Joseph's mother and implored here in the name of the Crucified One, to live these moments with Him. I embraced her and urged her to come with me, away from the emergency room where friends and relatives were flocking around, almost hysterical with grief.

We headed home to prepare the house for "our" son. We prayed and sang all night until dawn, and repeated over and over again our desire to do only God's will.

Joseph's mother, undoubtedly helped by a very special grace, said certain things to me that I had never heard her say before: "I thank God that my son died trying to save someone's life rather than trying to take someone's life" (an all too common occurrence). "I am sure," she continued "that my son is with God. I want to walk with my head high even if my heart is in pieces."

D. Silva

People came to ask us to go to the family of the other first aid worker killed in the accident in order to bring them "hope and courage". Little by little, with the help of the parish priest and many people of the Focolare community in that village, the funeral of these two young men took on not only the solemnity of a moment of God, but it was a moment of strength and hope. The goodbyes were prolonged as the people present were reluctant to leave.

During the following week we met all together in the little church for an hour of prayer followed by Mass. Joseph's mother, who could have been overcome by grief and overwhelmed by the events, remained firm and spoke with great dignity and peace to everyone about all that she had lived through. At a certain point she turned to me and said, "I have watched the way you live, but I didn't understand why you meet together. I trusted you but I wasn't personally convinced of what you were doing. I discovered something new, however, that we cannot keep the graces we have received from God for ourselves. I understood this through Joseph's death and through all that we have lived together here. I want to live giving my life for the others as he did.
I know you will help me."

**Around us the fighting** goes on. At times were are overtaken by fear. Just going to work summons all your courage because a bomb could go off at any moment. Many are still trying to leave the more dangerous areas. But all these events do not stop us. Our meetings take place as often and as regularly as possible as do our visits and phone contacts, all this to ensure the presence of Jesus among us and to remain united to all.

**Janine**

*1) Cf. Mt. 18:20; 2) A sentence of Scripture chosen for each month and briefly commented upon.*

# Much more than a memory

*The spiritual journey of an American businessman*

*by DON MITCHELL*

**My father was what** you would call an "American entrepreneur" in the very best sense of the word. He was extremely hard working and honest. And he was so self-reliant that I can remember my grandfather saying that when my father was in college, instead of asking for money, he sent money home!

For a short time, in the 1940's, he did work for a large corporation; but he quit so that he could run his own business. He bought a hardware store and worked long hours through good times and bad for forty years.

To keep up with the competition, over the years he changed the business into a gift store. Eventually, it became one of the oldest and largest in southern California. I might add that in his "spare time" he built the house in which my sister and I grew up.

**In 1978, my wife,** children and I had the wonderful opportunity to live in Loppiano for about four months. Loppiano is a mini-city built by the Focolare Movement near Florence, Italy. It is a city "on the mountain top" where everyone tries to live the Gospel message of love and unity.

While we were living there, my father and mother came to visit for a month or so. They saw how the people loved one another and lived and worked together in unity. They felt the love that was given to them and made friends with many people from all over the world.

I remember that when they first arrived in Loppiano, a young Focolarino suggested that we go out and get some flowers for my parents' room. He told me that he knew where some wild Irises were growing. Well, as it turned out, it took us an hour to find them. They seemed to be always "just up the road a bit." Then we searched all over for just the right vase to put them in. Finally, I took them to my parents and told them the whole story of where they had come from. My father was really touched that my friend would go to all that trouble for him and said, "He is such a nice guy."

In fact, each time my father would meet a new person in Loppiano he would say, "Boy, is that guy nice!" Finally I said ►

to him, "Dad, all the guys here are nice." And, after a moment's thought he responded, "Yes, I guess you're right. There isn't a bad apple in the bunch."

My parents had many such experiences in Loppiano and at one point we were able to meet Chiara Lubich, who was visiting the city at the time. Chiara was leaving Loppiano to go back to Rome and we were all lining the road to wave goodbye. A young man from the Cameroons picked some flowers and gave them to my daughter who was about five years old. She held them out for Chiara who stopped and shook hands with my parents. My father was quite touched by her kindness.

Memories of events such as these became the basis of conversation for years to come. But this visit to Loppiano was not just a memory in my father's mind. It turned out to be something that entered deeply into his heart and changed his life.

**Shortly after returning** home, my father had two strong experiences. One day, he was driving home from the store and saw a car that had broken down on the other side of the freeway. He noticed a Mexican couple standing helplessly beside the car. As he continued down the road he thought, "What would the guys in Loppiano do?" So he drove his car across the wide median strip and onto the freeway going back in the opposite direction. In California, this is quite a feat in itself! Then he took the man to a service station for help and even took the woman, who was late for work, to her job.

At the store a few days later, my father had his second experience. A woman came in asking for an item they did not carry. He told her that they didn't have it. As she walked out of the store he again thought about how the people in Loppiano would act in this situation. So he went out of the store and brought the woman back in. He sat her down and called some other stores on the telephone until he found one that had what she wanted. He then took her outside and pointed to where the store was that had what she wanted.

These two experiences opened up a new life for my father. He had always been a helpful and good person, but now he was committed to living the deeper life of selfless service he had found in Loppiano. His commitment was so total that he never completed re-decorating the house he had built forty years ago. It just seemed that all his time was spent taking care of other people's problems and projects.

**Over the years** that followed, his store truly became a place of love. In a way, it was like an oasis in the desert because the neighborhood had really deteriorated over the years. the police even designated it a high crime area in the city. Yet the store was never robbed and all the people looked out for my parents so that they were never in danger day or night.

*Mothers in the neighborhood would bring their children into the store "just so they could see something beautiful."*

Mothers in the neighborhood would bring their children into the store "just so they could see something beautiful." My father always took the children by the hand and showed them around. Widows would come in and visit when they felt lonely. "Whenever I'm depressed, I get dressed up and come into the store because I know I'll go away happy," many would say. Besides loving the people who came into the store, my father "took care of the streets." If he saw old persons walking around lost or confused, he would put them in his car and drive them around until they could find their house.

The store also became a place of unity. There were people of all nationalities, races and

social backgrounds that shopped in the store. My parents especially befriended blacks in the area and made many lifelong friends in the black community. There were Spanish speaking customers from both California and Mexico, so my mother learned Spanish at night school.

They had a special love for the Vietnamese people since they had endured so much in getting to the United States. They became especially close to two large Vietnamese clans who considered them as part of their families. My father helped one little Vietnamese boy get an ear operation that restored his hearing. Soon my parents' reputation spread throughout the whole Vietnamese community. Even a Vietnamese street gang used to stand around outside the store because they felt at home there.

And speaking of gangs, across the street there was a hangout for a group of older men who were into drugs and alcohol. My parents were always concerned about their well-being so they offered some of them jobs. They never judged them in a moralistic way but felt the tragedy of their lives and tried to help when they could. Once when I was with them in the car by the store, one of these men just "appeared" next to the car and greeted my parents as "mom and pop." They told me that he was the most clever of the group and always appeared or disappeared at the right time, "He would always disappear right before the cops arrived."

There was also a motorcycle gang that used a bar up the street as their headquarters. They liked to shop in the store because of the way they were treated. My father would say, "If you just concentrate on caring for them, being interested in them and their lives, just treat them like you would want them to be treated, then you won't be afraid of them." The gang members would often bring in their "old ladies," and tip my parents as much as forty dollars, which seemed to be their way of showing thankfulness. My mother was part of an urban renewal effort and could always just walk into the bar and convince the people to help out with renewal projects.

Fours years after his visit to Loppiano, my father's life began to follow the way of the cross. In 1982, his best friend died of a heart attack. Then a year later he experienced what had to be the greatest suffering of his life.

During the summer of 1983, my sister died in a tragic bicycle accident. She and her husband had completed a round-the-world bicycle trip a few years before. She had just sent off the final edited manuscript of her book about the trip, *Miles from nowhere*, to her publisher. She went out to practice cycling for an upcoming triathalon, and a few miles from her home she was fatally injured.

Despite his grief he continued to care for others in an almost heroic way. For example, one of his oldest friends who lived in another city was dying of cancer. My father drove each week to that city to help in whatever way he could. After his friend died, he continued his weekly trips to help his friend's widow. And after each trip, he would be exhausted from the travelling.

Then in January of 1985, my uncle and aunt came to visit my parents for a vacation. While they were there, my uncle complained about a pain he had been having and my father, true to form, made him go to a doctor. They discovered he had cancer. Because of the strain, my uncle then had a heart attack. So he stayed in my parents' city to have a heart operation, then an operation for the cancer. He and his whole family stayed at my parent's home for three ►

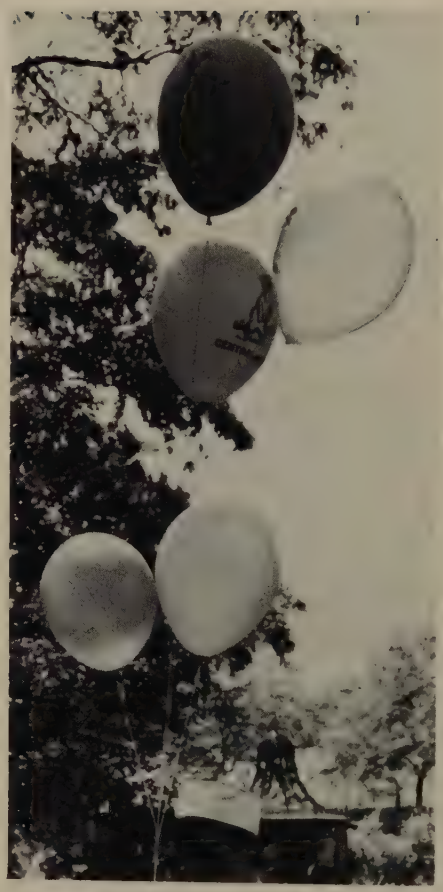
months during which time my father constantly served them and tended to their needs and shared their suffering.

Just a few days after my uncle and his family left, some old wiring in the building next to my father's store started a fire. The fire spread to my father's building, and his store burned to the ground. It was a total loss! The people in the neighborhood stood on the sidewalk and wept. Little children would come up to my father and mother and say how sorry they were for them. People called on the phone for months in tears lamenting how the one place of beauty and consolation in their lives was gone and asked, "What are we going to do?"

One man wrote a letter saying, "You don't know me, but my wife and I came into your gift store many times. The store was more than a store, it was a place of beauty ... a delight. You made each customer feel not like a customer but more like a friend. It is a loss to the large community of shoppers and browsers who came in to your store to feel better."

The fire had caused a great loss for my father. But it seemed he was an expert on knowing how to lose. His main concern was for the customers and that some children might get hurt in the charred ruins.

A few week after the store burned down, my father became ill and it was found that he had cancer and would most likely



*My wife's sister brought my father a bunch of balloons. She commented after that visit: "I went there sad and worried and came away really happy! ... I was the one who received the real gift!"*

only live for a few more months. Again he was completely concerned about others. He worked hard to get the insurance settlement on the store completed for my mother. He would say to her, "This illness has made me realize how much you mean to me and how much I love you." When other people came to visit, he never mentioned his illness, but entertained them with his wonderful sense of humor. He also had a wonderfully childlike interest in everything along with a mature and sincere concern for everyone he met.

For example, my wife asked her sister, who lives in the same city as my parents, to take them a bunch of balloons. She did so with some concern about what my father would be like. However, later she said, "It was a wonderful visit! At the time I was worried about my older son who had a problem. But your father kept asking me about my life and offered me some advice and hope concerning my son's problem. I went there sad and worried and came away really happy! It was a beautiful visit, and grace. And I was the one who received the real gift."

On the feast of the Visitation, I traveled to California to be with my father. I have very precious memories of my visit up to the time of his death. Two things of religious importance that happened during that time hold a special significance for me in understanding the "holy journey" that my father had traveled after his visit to Loppiano.

But to understand this significance you have to realize that through all of his life, my father was very much against

*(Continued on page 28)*

# Discovering the value of each person

## Education

### "You can't trust us"

In the public school where I teach I had a particularly heterogeneous class composed of students who thought I was mildly crazy to trust them. "Stick with us, Miss," they would encourage me, "You'll learn." Some would even go so far as to explain, "Look, we are troublemakers. We *know* each other. You *can't* trust us."

Many, many days I would lose my patience and command them into submission. The following day I would re-establish order, apologize for my lost temper of the previous day and immediately assign the day's work. Invariably they would look at each other and shake their heads.

One day in the class, just before the bell rang, Roy insulted Joe. It *was* a real insult and when Joe rose and began to pace down the aisle, his arms swinging in unison at his sides, I got around the desk and stepped into his path and escorted Roy out the door.

The class was thrilled. As I closed the door in Joe's face they began to chant: "Straps, straps..." (Fight, fight...) Outside, standing there I didn't know what to say to the boy. Why were they always acting like that. I looked up at him and groped for the words and in that lightning second, I realized that also Jesus on the cross had experienced darkness when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"[1] It was a chance to recognize him in this tiny reflection of his infinite "why" and love him, and then love Roy leading him out of his anger and anguish.

I found myself saying, "Look, Roy, "you can't say those things, and you can't hit Joe because, because ... he's a human being." In those two words I put all the reverance I would have used to say, "...because he is made in the image of God, he has a soul..." all the things I couldn't say to him. He seemed struck dumb. Finally he looked up and said, "Well, if that's the way it is, I guess I had better apologize."

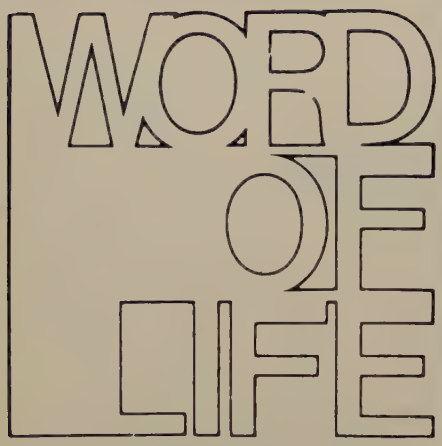
Now it was my turn to be floored. "Well," I told him, "if that is what you think you should do, then I'll go ask Joe to come out here."

As soon as I entered the room the chanting resumed. When Joe did go outside the class went wild, pushing and shoving to get up to the windows near the ceiling to watch the fight. Some tried weakly to advise me, "Don't do it, Miss. Don't you know they're gonna fight?" Once they were forced back into their seats there was instant silence. They were listening for noises from the hall. I was too. Nothing. I began to take roll.

Some moments passed. Joe walked in, they Roy. An air of solemnity enveloped both of them. They looked at no one and took their seats. The students looked at them, around at each other, then back at them. Silence took over the class.

Everybody sensed something important had happened and instinctively the class respected the decision the two apparently had made. The rapport among those students in the class, begun then, remained almost tangible throughout the remainder of the year.

This year a fight broke out near my classroom door. When I heard the chant begin: "Straps..." I ran outside. Blood was already streaming down one boy's face. I stepped close to his opponent and recognized Roy. He stared back at me and then his eyes cleared. "Oh, that's right. He's a human being." Then, backing away, he disappeared among the students. The other boy wiped off the blood and he too ducked away. M.A.




"To love (God) with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice."
(Mark 12:33)

**"To love (God) with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice."**

A scribe, that is, a doctor of the law, posed a question to Jesus: "Teacher, which is the first of all the commandments?" Jesus answered him: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... with all your mind, and with all your strength." And the second is: love your neighbor as yourself. The scribe then responded saying: Teacher, you answered well. To love God with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice. Then Jesus told him he was not far from the kingdom of God.

From this conversation we can observe how the doctor of the law wanted to express his full agreement and affinity to Jesus. In light of this Jesus not only praised him but encouraged him to enter the kingdom which he was offering with his very person.

**"To love (God) with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice."**

That God should be loved with all the strength of one's heart and mind was not a new concept for Israel. It logically followed the fact that he is our Father, the one who gave us life. It was also an accepted principle of Jewish tradition that love of neighbor was the best way to love and honor God. In fact, this is all confirmed by the scribe's answer.

In reality, however, the command of love of neighbor remained at a doctrinal level, unable to penetrate and transform the life of the believer. The great innovation that Jesus brought lay in having concretely made love of neighbor the synthesis of his teaching, the inspiring motive, the principle which gives life to all the commandments.

For Jesus, love of neighbor before being a doctrine was a new force. It is the same divine life that came on earth with him in order to transform the world. From this perspective we can well say that love of neighbor came into being with Jesus.

**"To love (God) with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice."**

We have then to look to Jesus, to the person of Jesus, in order to understand love of neighbor in all its radicality. By both his teaching and example he brought a real revolution into the world around him. First of all, Jesus loved everyone without differentiation. His love was great enough to break down all the barriers that separated social classes. In the community he was founding he brought together the poor, the sick, the lowly, the common people, the sinner: in other words all those categories of people which, according to the mentality of the times, were looked down upon. Nothing, in fact, is more contrary to Christ's Gospel than to consider ourselves superior to others or to exclude them.

In addition, Jesus gave himself totally to everyone. To those he met he gave all the riches of his mind and heart, of his healing power; he loved every neighbor as himself.

**"To love (God) with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice."**

Jesus never tired of teaching that the sacrifices which give honor to God and which he ex-

# EXPERIENCES

pected from us, are: to share our possessions with the poor; to accept others and listen to them; and to help the neighbor that God places next to us. It's enough to remember the parable of the Good Samaritan.[1] The person who truly worshipped God was the samaritan who took care of the poor unfortunate fellow whom he found on the road and not the levites who, upon their return from rendering service in the temple, passed him by without stopping to help.

Jesus brought about a radical change of mentality. If before, the center of all religious life was the temple and the rituals, the center became now one's neighbor and the care due that individual. We are certain to love God if we love our neighbor with whom Jesus totally identified. He said: "As often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me."(Matthew 25:40).

**"To love (God) with all our heart, with all our thoughts and with all our strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves is worth more than any burnt offering or sacrifice."**

The word of life for this month tells us two things therefore: firstly, to love our neighbor "as ourselves." If we are indifferent or passive in front of our neighbor's need, whether it be on the level of either material or spiritual goods, we cannot say that we love our neighbor as ourselves; we cannot say that we love him like Jesus does. In a community which wants to take its inspiration from the love that Jesus taught there can be no room for discrimination, inequality, alienation and neglect.

Secondly, this word of life tells us that we are certain to love God if we love our neighbor. To love God, in fact, is synonymous with doing his will and his will is that we love our neighbor.

This love urges us, first of all, to serve our neighbors where we commonly meet them: in the family, at work, in the community. As long as we see our neighbor as someone that has nothing to do with us, as someone who disturbs our peace, who upsets our plans, we cannot say that we love God with all our heart. Instead, every time we make the effort to overcome our selfishness and accept our neighbor the way he or she is, with their personality, with all their needs and demands, we offer God the most beautiful sacrifice imaginable. These are the actions that lead us to direct communion with God.

What a revolution we would set in motion around us if we lived like this.

Let's try. Fundamentally this is what Christianity is all about.

**Chiara Lubich**

In the school where I work I was having a lot of difficulties with the vice principal. Regulations dictated that students were to be brought to him for discipline, but whenever I did this he would let them off the hook, whereas I felt that in certain situations strong disciplinary action was really called for. I tried to be patient, giving him the benefit of the doubt, but I couldn't help feeling that things could be handled better.

One day I took him a particularly difficult student; once again he let him off the hook. It was just too much for me. I lost my patience and told him that I respected his position as vice principal but I could not agree with his line of action. Words started flying.

On one hand I was positive I was right, but on the other I knew I was a Christian before being a teacher. The word of life we were living was "We have passed out of death and into life ... because we love our brothers" (1 Jn. 3:14) I made my decision to love and stopped shouting. It took everything to overcome myself and listen to his side of the story.

All of a sudden, he too became very calm. He told me that he had much admiration for me as a teacher and appreciated the fact that I cared about the discipline of my students. We talked about the situation of the student I had brought in and soon we were able to come to a solution that was agreeable to both of us. **G.G.**

FAMILY LIFE

Weakened family life is one of the greatest social ills of our time. The "New Family" Movement has as its aim to bring the Focolare spirit of unity into family life, so that each family will be deeply united within itself and with other families.

# A new dawn everyday

*A factory closure, difficulty in finding work, financial problems—a couple describe how this situation led their family to a new understanding of the God's particular love for each of them.*

**Enzo and Cristina Casagni** were both employed by the same firm. One day, work stopped and there was no sign of it starting again. Their financial situation grew steadily worse. They had had other unfortunate work experiences in the past and so their savings, already at a low level, were running out.

"Our two children," Cristina said, "were accustomed to having everything they wanted and, without realizing it. I guess I was trying to compensate for the fact that I couldn't always be with them by satisfying their every demand."

Half-way through September the employees were made an offer that they could go back to work if they wanted but it would have to be part time. "We accepted." the Casagni's explained. "Obviously, what we made was only just enough to cover our basic needs. Thoughts of the immediate future really frightened us."

Cristina continued, "In the meanwhile, Enzo had made friends with a man at work who seemed to be different in his attitudes and behavior. Through him Enzo came into contact with some people in our town whose whole outlook on life impressed him.

"He tried to explain some of this to me but at that time I really couldn't be bothered to think about anything apart from my worries. I believed in God, but my relationship with him was very vague, and I hadn't been inside a church for at least ten years. So Enzo started meeting with these people by himself.

"As time went by I began to notice quite a change in him: he was much more patient with the children. He had always been a rather serious person but now he was smiling more often and his dealings with other people were different. It seemed too good to be true that something positive should come out of that sad time. I thought to myself, 'At last he's found some friends and it's helping him'."

**The need to escape**

One day he came home and told me that we'd both been invited to visit the town of Loppiano, the small permanent city of the Focolare. He gave me a muddled explanation that it was near Florence and that there were families there and lots of young people from all over the world who were trying to base their lives and everything they did on the Gospel.

*The Casagni family, from Latina, Italy, with their children Barbara and Cristiano.*

I didn't feel like leaving the children alone at home. My mother wasn't well either and... There were lots of excuses I could have made.

"Christmas was close at hand. I was upset because I couldn't buy anything for the children. I seemed to be continually crying and torn apart by worry. I even thought Enzo's enthusiasm was a little out of place. However, in the end I agreed to go. Perhaps I felt the need to escape even if only momentarily.

"We arrived at Loppiano on a Sunday morning after a hectic journey that had drained me of my last drop of energy. The impact was sharp. I felt out of place. We went into a hall full of people and some girls were singing a song—'*... if the Lord feeds the sparrows do you think he will let you starve? If the Lord clothes the lilies of the field do you think he will leave you unclothed?*' This, more or less, was the refrain. It challenged my desperation and at that moment I felt only confusion. But in the evening on the bus going back home I recalled my impressions of that friendly, calm atmosphere. I even remembered those words of the song that contained a truth I was to discover later. That night at home, despite the total exhaustion, I couldn't sleep. I asked myself how it was possible to live dependent only on God's providence.

"The next morning I decided rather belatedly to put into practice something of what I had gained from the previous day! I would try to love my neighbor and not let myself be engulfed by worries. The realities of every day could be faced with more faith, and I would deal with the problems one at a time."

A new chapter began as the Casagni family started to see God's love shown in the promptness of his providence.

It was not that the situation changed suddenly or that the difficulties miraculously disappeared and were replaced by plenty. But together, bound by a stronger relationship, they managed to perceive the wisdom of divine teaching which helped them to develop as individuals and as a family.

**Bankrupt**

"A few months later," Enzo explained, "the firm went ►

bankrupt and we were waiting for supplementary benefits. Cristina meanwhile was given the chance of a job. It was short term but it solved our more immediate pressing needs. I stayed at home and took over Cristina's role of looking after the children and the house.

"Occasionally I had to call her at work to find out how to cook something, but it was a very positive time in my relationship with her and the children. Then, just as Cristina's job came to an end, my supplementary benefits were sorted out."

Cristina interrupted, "This state of affairs, although still full of difficulties, gave us the opportunity of acquiring a great treasure: we learned to live completely in the present moment, without thinking about the past or worrying about the future. We were sustained by the Gospel text, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and his way of holiness, and all these things will be given you besides' (Mt. 6:33).

"I was offered the chance of a job in Rome. It wasn't ideal but I didn't feel I could afford to refuse. I began a commuter's existence. I left home at 6 a.m. and got back at 8 p.m. Traveling at dawn, I saw each new day begin, but I no longer felt the weight of the previous day, nor anxiety for the future. It was a new day open before me to be lived. But as fifteen months went by, that way of life became increasingly difficult. The children were growing up and I had less and less time to give to them. I was so tired when I arrived home that I couldn't make it to spend any

*Enzo: "Experiencing the strength that the Gospel communicates has helped us to enjoy the 'little things' and to face unforeseen events and trials without panic."*

time with them. Enzo and I realized that we couldn't go on like this; something else had to turn up. Enzo was still on supplementary benefits so there was enough to live on. I left my job.

"After only a week we heard that our old company, which had been restructured, was going to open again. They called Enzo for an interview and he was one of the first to be re-employed.

"At last I could give more time to the children. It was then that I realized how much they had changed. They had moved from an existence made up of useless and expensive things that never satisfied them, to a life of essentials. The fact that they had shared every change and difficulty with us had matured them and cemented the bond between us. There was a serene and relaxed atmosphere in our family, despite everything that was happening, and we were all acquiring the ability to speak and listen and communicate with one another on a level that was helping the children to become more balanced and secure in themselves.

Then, more problems arrived, and big ones at that. The factory had reopened but it still wasn't doing very well. Enzo was once more without a job. For Cristina it was a year of one job after another. It was very difficult to support the family. "We had to find a solution that would provide some financial stability for our family," Cristina said.

"There was the temptation to panic, but instead we tried to start each new day with the desire of understanding what God's plan might be. We had to live the present moment well in order to build a better future.

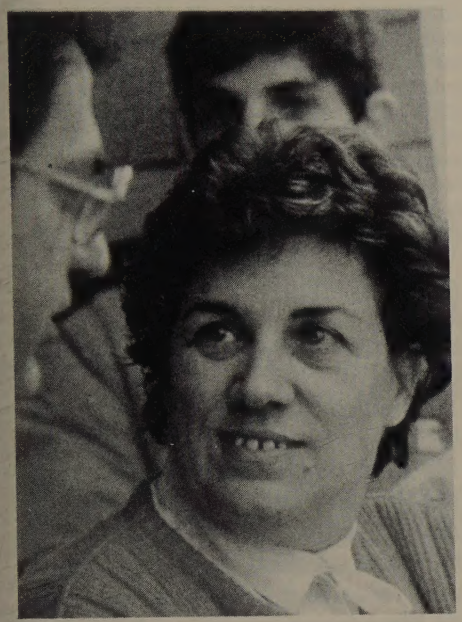
"One day I received a phone call from a factory where I had worked temporarily five years before. They wanted to know about my present work and asked me to go and see them. I didn't know what it was all about; would it be just more temporary work? Why should they remember me after all those years?"

**"Our only certainty"**

"As it turned out, they did have a job for me, a full-time one. It was like a dream. Once again Enzo would be in charge of the household. On top of that he was also trying to set up a business of his own which demanded a great deal of energy."

"The business is going well now," Enzo intervened. "We don't have too much to spare but we have the essentials and some measure of security.

"Experiencing the strength that the Gospel communicates," he went on, "has helped us to enjoy the 'little things', and to face unforseen events and trials



*Cristina: "Traveling at dawn I saw each new day begin, but I no longer felt the weight of the previous day, nor anxiety for the future. It was a new day opened before me to be lived."*

without panic. The Gospel has become for us our only certainty and, through trying to put Jesus' words into practice, we have noticed that, almost without realizing it, we have moved out of ourselves and towards the rest of humanity. When we had almost everything we looked only at ourselves. We were always hoping to better things for ourselves. Now we are almost instinctively aware of others and prepared to help them.

"Not too long ago we offered hospitality to a Polish refugee who came for a month. After that we were able to take in a young unwed mother and help her to heal the breach with her family and get married."

**Compiled by Mariele Quartana**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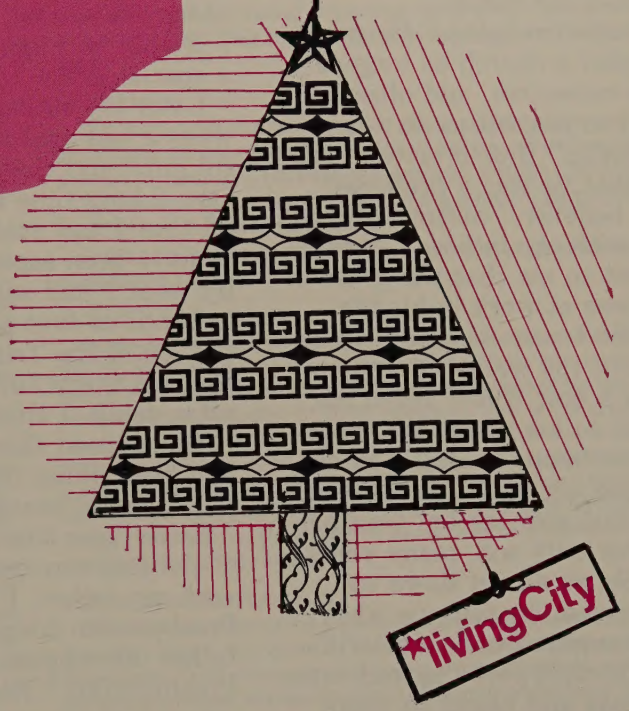


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*(Continued from page 20)*
"organized religion." He never attended a church as long as I can remember, and often referred to himself as an "agnostic." But in spite of the fact that he was a professed "non believer," during my final visit with my father, it became evident to me that the grace of God was at work in his life.

While I was staying with my parents, the widow of my father's best friend asked me to talk to her about her theory of what happens after you die. She had not only lost her husband but also her ten year old son, her only son, many years ago. So we all sat down together and she told me what she thought about an afterlife. For the most part I agreed with her ideas and began to share some ideas from my own Christian tradition. This lead to my talking about many religious topics, especially of the Trinity.

Speaking about these things was very difficult for me, given my father's illness and the situation of his friend's widow. I thought that what I said could not be just a "lecture" of ideas but had to be a "song" from the heart. I remembered that I had traveled to California on the Feast of the Visitation. I had come with the attitude to love and serve my father and share this time with and for him. But also I did wish that there would be a time when I could share something of the faith that was in my heart. So, I felt that this was to be my "Magnificat" for my father. I prayed as I spoke, and I felt a special grace.

Later my father told me that what I had said was "a beautiful gift" and that "it would take a long time to appreciate all that I had said." He seemed to have been especially touched by what I had said about the dynamic of love and unity in the life of the Trinity—a life that we would fully share in after death. I think he especially understood this because he had been living that reality for so many years.

Some days later, during one of the last conversations I had with my father, I mentioned a Presbyterian friend of mine. My father interrupted, "I am a Presbyterian!" His remark completely surprised me and I asked him what he meant. He said that as a young man growing up in Idaho, he had decided to be baptized in the community church and that it had been a Presbyterian church. "So, I guess that means that I am a Presbyterian," he added in a very relaxed and certain tone of voice. Now, the way he said this was not just a statement of fact but a real acknowledgement and recognition of what he was. A kind of reaffirmation of that baptism he had received many, many years.

If our journey to God is one that advances through love and suffering in imitation of Christ, then I truly believe that my father had traveled that way of the cross. When I arrived in California at the beginning of those last weeks, I was concerned about what I would find. But as I got off the plane, my father's warm smile immediately put me at ease. And, as I remember the last time I saw him, I just remember his smile. He died at the precise moment that I was receiving communion and praying that God "share this communion with my father and raise him up to the fullness of life."

**I have been speaking** mostly about my father. But this is really the story about both my father and mother. They lived this journey together. My father's death has been another step in my mother's journey. She has told me that being able to "make herself one" with others has given a very special joy to her heart. Soon she will be doing volunteer work with needy persons in her community.

A few days after my father's death, my mother and I passed their cactus garden and she paused in surprise. She exclaimed, "Look at that old cactus! It's called 'The Bishop!s Cap,' and I almost threw it out because it has never bloomed in all the years I have had it. I've had it for more than twenty years and thought it was dead." On top of the cactus were two beautiful and perfectly formed yellow flowers resting against each other. I thought to myself, "My father's journey is over. He and my sister are now together forever." □

# What is the Focolare Movement?

## THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

## WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

## THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

## GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

## THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

## PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

## FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

## ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

## SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

## PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

## MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

## FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio. TX 78216

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
Roslindale, MA 02131

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